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ABSTRACT

Specific objectives of this study were to (1) obtain information about the pattern of young children's social studies concept attainment, (2) compare basic concept attainment with social studies concept attainment, and (3) compare basic concept development of children from two age/grade levels. A total of 24 kindergarten and 28 first graders of middle socioeconomic status were interviewed individually during a 35 to 45 minute session. The assessment instrument consisted of two sets of tasks: those measuring social concepts and those measuring basic concepts. No significant differences were found for race or sex. However, significant differences were found between the two grades in both total basic concept and total social concept scores. First graders obtained higher scores than kindergarteners on both measures. It was also indicated that knowledge of social concepts developed in tandem with basic concept growth and that concept development remained about the same from kindergarten to first grade. Results suggested that this line of research will provide needed clarification of the parameters of young children's social studies concepts and provide empirical information to guide the choice of key concepts for social studies instruction. (BJD)

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Assessment of Social Studies Concepts in Early Childhood

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Preliminary Draft

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Purpose

Social studies should be a fundamental component of the early childhood program. It can provide a strong foundation in the skills and knowledge necessary for later more formal social education. (Pagano, 1978, p. 82). Broman (1982) even describes social studies as "the 'glue' that bonds together the curriculum for young children" (p. 203).

In practice, however, the social studies often do not receive adequate attention in early childhood education. A number of factors might account for this, including the emphasis on the basics and minimal competency testing in reading and mathematics. This is unfortunate, because evidence exists to demonstrate both the potential importance of early childhood social studies and the ability of young children to learn this material (Jantz, 1976; Pagano, 1978; and McKinney et al., 1982).

We have begun a line of research to help clarify some of the questions involved in this issue. Our initial purpose has been to develop a social studies assessment procedure and then to clarify just where children are in the development of social studies concepts. We should also like to assess which social concepts should be taught in early childhood and how this might best be accomplished. We hope this work will contribute to the rational improvement and expansion of the social studies in early childhood education.

Rationale and Objectives

Cole and D'Andrade (1982) reviewed the research on the influence of schooling on concept formation. Schooling was found to have a profound effect on the organizing principles that guide people's actions. These organizing principles are reflected in the child's use of the language of classification. Further support for the importance of concept learning in early childhood is offered by Wellman (1982). Wellman perceives a need for assessment of young children's concept development levels in order to obtain normative data through the use of new procedures designed to fit young children rather than modifications of methods designed for use with older children. We have attempted to attack both these problems through our choice of an assessment approach.

Jantz (1976, p. 87), after reviewing early childhood social studies concepts research, concluded that further study was needed on the relationship of concepts and non concepts and on the identification of the types of concepts which young children can learn. This area of concern remains little researched despite its importance for education. In particular (as mentioned by Wellman, 1982) there is an absence of instruments for measuring social studies concept attainment in young children. For example, Koeller (1981) reviewed the available research on young children's knowledge of economics. She concluded that there were no satisfactory instruments which tapped both knowledge and reasoning. Bearison (1977) suggests that another problem is that in doing evaluation research in social studies the curricula usually have very general objectives that are not

testable. We hope that our assessment procedure will lead to the formulation of more specific objectives for Social Studies instruction.

Furth (Furth et al, 1976; Furth, 1979; and Furth, 1980) has developed a Piagetian based approach to obtaining information regarding social institutions which he has used with children ages five through eleven. Furth asked children what they knew about school, stores, money, payment, community, government, specific jobs, and role acquisition. He found five categories (or stages) in the development of logical thinking in the areas into which he inquired. Furth's approach was strictly verbal. In designing an assessment instrument we felt that a task should include some action and activity on the child's part and offer an opportunity for success to the child who may not be able to express himself in a strictly verbal interview approach. This method is described in the next section.

The long term goal of our research is to develop procedures that can be used by teachers to ascertain the social studies concept attainment level of young children. The information can be used to guide the selection of key concepts and teaching strategies to be included in early childhood social studies instruction.

The specific objectives of our research are:

- To obtain information regarding the pattern of young children's social studies concept attainment.
- To compare basic concept attainment with social studies concept attainment.
- To compare basic concept development of children from two age/grade levels.

Methodology

The subjects of the study are 24 kindergarten and 28 first grade middle SES students. This age/grade period is critical within the Piagetian developmental framework in that it is the time of transition when most children begin to move from preoperational to concrete operational thinking (Gardner, 1978). Thus data obtained at this critical time will have relevance to preschool, kindergarten and primary education. Preoperational children are usually characterized by thought that is perceptually constrained to focusing on the most obvious aspect of a problem. Concrete operational children begin to be able to consider two or more aspects of a situation at one time.

The assessment instrument used in the present study is individually administered to each child during a session of 35-45 minutes. During the interview session one researcher interviews the child while the other records the child's responses on a recording sheet. The assessment instrument consists of two sets of tasks: The Social Concepts Assessment Task developed by the authors and the Basic Concepts Assessment task which uses procedures developed by Brainard (1979). Sorting is used as the major mode of response because concept learning in early childhood is dominated by the learning of basic categories (Bruner, et al, 1966; Inhelder and Piaget, 1964; Klausmeier, et al, 1974; Isenberg and Jacobs, 1981; Rosch and Lloyd, 1978)

The Social Studies Concepts Assessment Tasks each consist of sets of eight pictures, four for each concept to be identified in each sort. The child is

first asked to sort the pictures spontaneously into two piles. If he is not correct in his response, he is then asked to sort on the basis of a clue (e.g. "Put the pictures of old people here and the pictures of young people here."). The questions are patterned after previous work on the development of classification skills in young children (Charlesworth, 1968). The nine sets of social studies concepts are: Young-Old, Urban-Rural, Family-Not Family, Past-Present, Rich-Poor, War-Peace, Groups-Individuals, Houses-Other Buildings and People Who Protect Us-People Who Don't Protect Us. Following each sort the child is asked to justify his choices ("Why do these belong together?" or "How do you know these are...?").

For the Basic Concepts Tasks the children are also asked to sort objects or pictures into two groups of "things that belong together". First an object warmup task is presented followed by Brainard's three tasks: simple object sorting (color and shape), class extension (color, shape and number), and cross classification (completing simple matrices).

The Basic Concepts Tasks are administered first. The Social Studies tasks are administered second with each child receiving the tasks in a different randomly determined order.

A basic concept score and a total social studies concept score are arrived at by assigning numerical values based on the child's degree of correctness of sort and the logic and maturity of his level of justification. Each individual Social Studies concept task is also evaluated as to level of response.

Results

Using a nonparametric ANOVA (Wilcoxin Rank Sum Test) no significant differences were found for race (black/white), sex or test forms A and B. There were significant differences in both Total Basic Concepts Scores (TBCS) ($z=-2.9312$; $p < |z| = .0034$) and Total Social Concepts Scores (TSCS) ($z=-4.1791$; $p < |z| = .0000$)between the two grades. First graders obtained higher scores than kindergarteners on both measures. On six of the individual tasks this same relationship was found. For Protect/Not Protect, Groups vs. Individuals and Houses vs. Other Buildings there was not a significant grade difference.This was probably due to the relative difficulty of Protect/Not Protect and the relative easiness of Groups/Individuals and Houses/Other Buildings for both kindergarteners and first graders (See Table 3 for Mean Scores).

A Spearman Rank Order Correlation was applied to the data. TBCS was significantly correlated with age ($r=.41$, p .002), grade ($r=.41$, $p<.002$) and TSCS ($r=.61$, $p < .0001$). TSCS are significantly correlated with all task subscores (see Table 1).

The Friedman 2 Way ANOVA was used for overall analysis of question difficulty. The overall test statistic $\chi^2=25.5$, $p < .05$ for overall Alpha and $p < .001$ for individual question comparisons. Four task clusters which differed signifcantly were found for the kindergarteners and three which differed significantly for the First Graders.

Table 2 includes the Kindergarten and First Grade clusters and continua which show the relative difficulty of the individual concept tasks. Four clusters emerged from the Kindergarten data and three from the first grade data.

Discussion

The two forms of the SCAT (Social Concepts Assessment Tasks) yielded equivalent results. This indicates that the assessment tasks can be duplicated and might be used as an assessment tool by classroom teachers. The positive relationship of the SCAT scoreswith the BCAT (Basic Concepts Assessment Tasks) scores indicates that knowledge of social concepts develops in tandem with basic concept growth.

The relative difficulty of the nine concepts remains about the same from kindergarten to first grade. However, the clustering indicates an increase in the number of concepts in the least difficult cluster for the first graders and a reduction to three clusters which reflects the first graders increasing mastery of all the concepts. Three out of four of the most difficult concepts for kindergarteners remain the most difficult for the first graders. See Table 3 for the mean scores on each task.

A consideration of the relative difficulty level of the nine concepts presents some interesting considerations. A popular paradigmn for sequencing social concepts instruction is from self, to family, to neighborhood, to community, to state, to nation, to the world. That is, instruction moves from what is apparently most familiar to that which is least familiar. However, our results indicate that first hand experience does not seem to necessarily consolidate concept definitions for young children. For example, family should be easy and yet at both grade levels it was one of the most difficult. War would be far removed from first hand experience but was one of the least difficult concepts. Young children are familiar with police, fire fighters, doctors and soldiers but have difficulty grouping them under their protective function. Rich and poor might seem to be a clearcut dichotomy but this concept was also relatively difficult. The difficulty of past and present was not surprizing since 'past' is a more abstract concept that is removed from the young child's experience except in a very limited way.

Implications

The Social Studies Concepts Assessment Tasks do seem to offer a useful means of determining the level of social studies concept attainment of young children. The sorting behavior coupled with the child's ability to give a logical justification for his actions reflects the perceptual knowledge of the concept and his ability to relate verbally his breadth of information regarding the concept. The child's ability to sort spontaneously or to need a verbal clue reflects the child's conceptual maturity.

The line of research being persued will provide a needed clarification of the parameters of young children's social studies concepts. It will also provide empirical information to be used as a guide in choosing key concepts for social studies instruction by providing direction for choosing teachable concepts. It will place the spotlight on an important area of early childhood curriculum, which presently is sorely neglected as an area of research and instruction.

Further Research

Since this preliminary study was completed the BCAT and SCAT were administered to 129 public school kindergarten and first grade students in order to broaden our data base and ascertain whether the same trends would show up with a broader socioeconomic cross section of subjects. This data is now being analyzed.

For the future we will be looking in more depth at some of the concepts included in this investigation.

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Table 1

Spearman Rank Order Correlations of Total Social Concepts Scores (TSCS) and Total Basic Concepts Scores (TBCS) with Individual Concept Scores

Individual Concepts	Correlations With	
	TSCS	TBCS
1. Young-Old	.78, $p < .0001$	.53, $p < .0001$
2. Urban-Rural	.61, $p < .0001$	.51, $p < .0001$
3. Family-Not Family	.61, $p < .0001$	.32, $p < .02$
4. Past-Present	.62, $p < .0001$	.32, $p < .02$
5. Protect-not Protect	.42, $p < .002$	.40, $p < .003$
6. Rich-Poor	.68, $p < .0001$	.31, $p < .02$
7. War-Peace	.59, $p < .0001$	.33, $p < .015$
8. Groups-Individuals	.36, $p < .008$	.34, $p < .013$
9. Houses-Other Buildings	.51, $p < .0001$	.44, $p < .001$
Total Social Concepts Score		.61, $p < .0001$

Table 2

Difficulty Levels for the Nine Social Concepts for Kindergarten and First Grade Subjects: Clusters and Continuums

Easiest	Kindergarten Clusters			Most Difficult
	A	B	C	D
	8. Groups/Individuals	3. Houses/Other Buildings	1. Old/Young	6. Rich/Poor
	9. Houses/Other Buildings	7. War/Peace	6. Rich/Poor	5. Protect/Not Protect
	7. War/Peace	2. Urban/Rural		3. Family/Not Family
	2. Urban/Rural	1. Old-Young		4. Past/Present

Kindergarten Continuum

Least Difficult — Most Difficult

8 9 7 2 1 6 5 3 4

Friedman 2-Way Anova, χ^2=25.5, Overall $p < .05$, individual questions $p < .001$

First Grade Clusters

Easiest — Most Difficult

A	B	C
7. War/Peace	6. Rich/Poor	4. Past/Present
9. Houses/Other Buildings	4. Past/Present	3. Family/Not Family
8. Groups/Individuals	3. Family/Not Family	5. Protect/Not Protect
2. Urban/Rural		
1. Old/Young		

First Grade Continuum

Least Difficult — Most Difficult

7 9 8 2 1 6 4 3 5

Friedman 2-Way Anova, χ^2=25.5, Overall $p < .05$, individual questions $p < .001$

Table 3

Mean Scores of Kindergarten and First Grade Students On Nine Social Concepts Tasks

Task	Mean Scores	
	Kindergarteners N=24	First Graders N=28
1. Young-Old	5.83	8.54
2. Urban-Rural	7.17	8.93
3. Family-Not Family	3.00	5.43
4. Past-Present	2.63	5.46
5. Protect-Not Protect	3.54	3.75
6. Rich-Poor	3.67	6.18
7. War-Peace	7.71	9.14
8. Groups-Individuals	8.58	8.96
9. Houses-Other Buildings	7.83	9.36